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The Cover Design

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THE COVER DESIGN

Music notation has caused problems for thousands of people over the course of many centuries. How can one express complex sounds—or even a simple melody—in an efficient, widely accepted form of notation? What kind of notation lends itself to easy reading? There have been many attempts at useful notations, and yet even the best-known solutions offered by the Western music tradition of the last few centuries have stymied composers, arrangers, and struggling music students alike. One system, proposed in the middle of the nineteenth century and still in use today, is tonic sol-fa, which is an anglicized adaptation of the traditional Guidonian solmi-zation syllables used to denote the tones of a musical scale.

John Curwen (1816–80) was a Congregationalist minister in Britain who, as a nonmusician, was befuddled in his efforts to teach children standard musical notation. He investigated several methods and decided to adapt an adaptation (by Sarah Glover) of the traditional do-re-mi syllables, which he published in a Congregation-alist journal that he edited. While only twenty-five years old at the time of his inven-tion, he was to spend the rest of his life perfecting the method, and it was to be taken up by his son and other followers, primarily in Britain, through that century and up to the present day. His efforts as an individual, which were motivated by a mission to promote church singing, appeared in several self-published series, most notably the *Tonic Sol-fa Reporter* (Plaistow, 1851; two issues only), the *Popular Educator*

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(Plaistow, 1852), the *Tonic Sol-fa Reporter and Magazine of Vocal Music for the People* (Plaistow, 1853–1927), and the *Musical Herald* (Plaistow, 1888–1920), which was later known as the *Musical News and Herald* (Plaistow, 1920–27). While a rather large number of people learned to read music with his system to the exclusion of traditional notation, tonic sol-fa was not designed as a replacement of western notation but rather as a supplement to it in early stages of training. He established a publishing firm, J. Curwen & Sons, in 1863 and the Tonic Sol-fa College in 1869. The system is explained in some detail in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2d ed. online at www.grovemusic.com/grovemusic/shared/views/article/html?section=music.28124 (last accessed August 30, 2001)).

As a publisher, Curwen issued works for the teaching of singing in churches and homes, followed by works aimed at schools. The firm, which at first promoted the new system exclusively, evolved to become a major publisher of music educational materials. His son, John Spencer (1847–1916), grew up in the middle of the tonic sol-fa movement, became involved as a teacher and editor of the *Tonic Sol-fa Reporter* and its successors, and eventually took over the management of the publishing company. The firm passed briefly into another son's hands after John Spencer's death, then to John Kenneth Curwen (1881–1935), John's grandson. Renamed J. K. Curwen, the firm enlarged its catalog to include orchestral music by such composers as Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Edgar Varèse. John Kenneth's son, Christopher (1911–), took over the firm in 1935 and sold it to what is now known as Macmillan in 1969, with its items being distributed in recent times by Faber Music and Robertson Publications. What started as an idea for helping children learn music notation developed into a small publishing empire and today has been amalgamated into the mainstream music publishing industry. For more on the Curwen Press, see Herbert Simon's *Songs and Words: A History of the Curwen Press* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1973).

The printer's device adopted by the Curwen Press (the present image is from John Spencer Curwen's *Old Plaistow* [Plaistow: Parker/Curwen, 1891]) is one of a very few in the history of printing that refers to musical notation. In an allusion to one popular branch of traditional trade devices, this design interweaves the monogram of John Spencer Curwen in a lyre and a text banner that reads "J. Curwen and Sons." One side of the lyre (old notation) and the other (tonic sol-fa) are united by the friendly clasped hands, which together signify J. S. Curwen's desire to encourage a harmonious adoption of both systems. Even today, some teachers promote the tonic sol-fa in the early stages of teaching traditional western musical notation. For another house device, Curwen Press also used various images of a unicorn designed by Lovat Fraser, Paul Woodroffe, Eric Gill, and others.

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